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## Desire, Heavenly Bodies, and a Surrealist's Fascination with the Celestial Theatre

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**John G. Hatch**  
The University of Western Ontario

**Abstract.** In 1922, the German Surrealist artist Max Ernst produced a montage work that included a woman's bare buttocks protruding out of the rings of Saturn. It is, to say the least, an unusual combination of images, but one that addresses some very basic human impulses. Largely, it expresses Ernst's understanding that inscribed upon the night sky are some of our deepest held fears and fantasies. Ernst sought to generate contemporary re-phrasings of our mythologizing of the cosmos in a complex and often enigmatic way, drawing on such varied sources as Freudian psychology, late nineteenth-century symbolism, alchemy, and Surrealism. Ultimately, Ernst manages to weave an intricate, cryptically autobiographical narrative through such astronomical bodies and groups of stars as Saturn, the Pleiades, Praesepe, and Cygnus, to name but a few. This paper navigates some of the celestial imagery found in the work of Ernst between 1919 and 1934 in the hopes of demonstrating, in its own small way, just how rich a source astronomy has been for modern and contemporary art.

In a biographical note published in 1921, the German artist Max Ernst is described in the following, somewhat unusual terms:

Born in 1891 in Brühl, present residence Cologne. Now in his early thirties, good-looking, very intelligent, a painter, not so much out of a love of art as out of laziness and age-old traditions... His secretions are full of vegetable and animal remains. He is known as a sharp crowfoot. Those suffering from palsy and [the] shipwreck[ed] can always rely on him for depth soundings and information on coastal waters. The Pythagorean theorem has become completely ingrained in him. He

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deserted his father and mother at the tender age of twelve to go hunting adolescent railways and major flatfish[...].  
 [...] he is intimately acquainted with the Northern Celestial Hemisphere. He is extremely fond of observing, in the close proximity of Mizar, a star of the fifth magnitude known as Alcor or the Little Horseman. This star has served as a test of sharp vision ever since antiquity. A shame Alcor went to stud so soon. It would have been a midsummer sensation.<sup>1</sup>

The irreverent tone of this biography is not untypical of an artist who at the time associated himself with Dada, an artistic designation that originated in Zurich in 1916 with a riotous group of performers, writers, and artists, who rebelled against the European cultural values that they believed had led to the atrocities of the First World War. Yet, in spite of the many absurdities found in Ernst's short biography, one has to admit a certain poetic richness in the language and imagery it conjures. It is this quality that brought Ernst to the attention of a group of French writers, who in 1924 founded the Surrealist movement out of the remains of French Dada.

In what follows, I will be taking you on a rather circuitous journey through Ernst's work, the thread of which will be determined by his use of celestial imagery. I'll be focusing largely on works from the seminal years of Ernst's association with Dada and Surrealism, a time frame that is loosely bracketed by the years 1919 and 1934. This is not to say that Ernst's interest in astronomy ended in 1934, since his use of celestial imagery persisted until his death in 1976. However, the reasons for its use and the manner it is used were defined chiefly within the fifteen-year period I am focusing on in this essay. I must also preface my discussion by warning the reader who is unfamiliar with Ernst's work that his art is unusual and frightfully enigmatic. It is often highly personal, draws on some extremely obscure sources, is infused with a heavy dose of Freudian psychology, which Ernst was studying at the University of Bonn at the outbreak of the First World War, and the work purposely avoids any type of interpretative closure. Ernst also believed that our lives are formed by a clash between our own desires and outside forces that are beyond our control. This clash

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Werner Spies (ed.), *Max Ernst: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1991), p. 296. I have taken the liberty of correcting the spelling of 'Alcor' which has persisted for some inexplicable reason in a number of English sources (including the one I have cited from) as 'Aktor', the Polish word for 'actor'. In addition, it must be noted that the biographical note has erred with regards to the magnitude of Alcor, a fourth magnitude star.

is echoed in Freudian psychology with the struggle between our conscious and unconscious wants, in social terms between the self and the cultural values of society, in mythology between mortals, half-mortals and the Gods, and so on. All of these points are ingeniously communicated in Ernst's biographical note starting with the fact that it is co-written by Ernst and his friend Hans Arp, with no hint as to who wrote what part, and by the references made to celestial phenomena, both in terms of the stories we've inscribed on the night sky and the beliefs in their influence.

To begin, we might ask ourselves why was Ernst so fond of observing the star Alcor? On the one hand, as a visual artist, Ernst probably relished the story of Alcor and Mizar being used as an ancient way of testing one's eyesight.<sup>2</sup> There is also the theme of travel associated with these stars, with Mizar and Alcor described in many mythological accounts as horse and rider (although there is some disagreement as to which is the horse and which is the rider).<sup>3</sup> The idea of travel appealed to Ernst as a metaphor for our journey through life as expressed in somewhat familiar terms in Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, or as echoed in the popular German tale of the poor wagoner named Hans Dumkin, who offered his hospitality to Christ. The wagoner had always wanted to travel, so in return for his hospitality Christ gave him Alcor, enabling Dumkin to sightsee for eternity.<sup>4</sup>

There is also an ancient belief that Alcor is the lost Pleiad, Electra.<sup>5</sup> Ernst has a couple of works specifically associated with the cluster of stars in Taurus known as the Pleiades, or the seven sisters. In 1921, the year the above cited biography appeared, Ernst produced the photocollage *Approaching Puberty...* (Fig. 1). The title of this work is taken from the inscription found at the bottom that reads: 'The approaching puberty has yet to remove the grace of our pleiades/our sight full of shadows is directed to the falling cobblestone/the gravitation of the waves does not exist yet'. The cluster is represented by six of its seven main stars on the torso of the nude figure, with three of the stars pencilled in, and three others

<sup>2</sup> Sight was a theme that obsessed Ernst as first discussed by Lucy Lippard in 'The World of Dadamax Ernst', *Art News* 74, no. 4 (April 1975): pp. 29–30.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Hinckley Allen, *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1963), p. 446. A most useful source on celestial mythology that served extensively in the drafting of this paper is Anne Wright, *The Fixed Stars* (1998), available at [http://www.astroweb.cz/doc/clanky/fixed\\_stars.pdf](http://www.astroweb.cz/doc/clanky/fixed_stars.pdf) (accessed 16 February 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Allen, p. 446.

<sup>5</sup> Allen, p. 446.

represented by the nipples and belly button. The missing seventh star, missing largely because only six of the seven stars are visible to the naked eye, may be the faceless nude who stares down at the falling cobblestone and who may, in turn, represent the wife of the French writer Paul Eluard, Gala Eluard, whom Ernst was openly having an affair with at the time.<sup>6</sup> The meaning of the waves and the falling cobblestone likely allude to the popular account of a woman's menstrual cycle as influenced by the gravity of the moon. This interpretation is further supported by the title Ernst actually gave this work for one exhibition, *The Wet-Nurse of the Star*, which suggests that at one point Ernst saw the smudged area at the top right as an image of the Milky Way. This lends credence to Werner Spies' suspicion that *Approaching Puberty...* was inspired by Tintoretto's *The Birth of the Milky Way* (National Gallery, London), painted around 1575.<sup>7</sup> If we assume that instead of being missing, the seventh sister is simply represented by the female nude, then she could be Maia, the eldest of the seven sisters, whose name rhymes with Gala, and means, amongst other things, 'nurse' and 'mother'.

The Pleiades return in a slightly different guise in Ernst's 1929 collage novel *La Femme 100 tête*, a title that is a clever French word play that can be read as 'woman with 100 heads', 'woman without a head', or 'woman becomes stubborn'. One plate shows seven young girls sleeping together in a bed and bears the following caption: *Here All Together Are My Seven Sisters, Often Living on Liquid Dreams and Perfectly Resembling Sleeping Leaves* (Fig. 2). The theme of dreaming has obvious links to Freud's theories describing dream imagery as disguised expressions of our unconscious sexual desires. The collaged laboratory equipment above the heads of the sisters suggests an act of sexual intercourse, the result of which is probably the curious half-human, half-machine figure whose meaning may derive from Ernst's interest in alchemy. This creature is most likely an androgyne representing the culmination of the alchemical process symbolized by the union of the two sexes; it combines a woman's arm and a man's lower body, a duality further illustrated by the playing card that is

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<sup>6</sup> The work was originally inscribed 'to Gala' at the lower left: Werner Spies, *Max Ernst, Collages: The Invention of the Surrealist Universe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 257, n. 387. It should be noted that Ernst had six sisters of his own, of which only 4 survived early childhood, and the Pleiades may be a reference to his own family.

<sup>7</sup> Spies, *Max Ernst, Collages*, p. 76.

made up of half of the Queen of Clubs and half of the Jack of Diamonds.<sup>8</sup> The presence at the bottom left corner of a model solar system, an image taken from the French science journal *La Nature* (a source for much of Ernst's scientific images), further ties this print to alchemy. Essentially, Ernst links the seven sisters to the seven ancient planets of the alchemical process, a process that involves the transformation of primal matter into silver and gold, and those seven planets are in turn related to the seven days of the week, a link Ernst makes himself in his 1934 collage novel, *Une Semaine de bonté*.

The description of the alchemical process as proceeding over a period of seven days (intentionally paralleling the biblical account of the seven days of creation), may explain Ernst's 1922 work, *My Little Mont Blanc* (Fig. 3). This collage print, which the American artist Joseph Cornell paid tribute to in a cleaned-up version of 1942 (with the insertion of a bird's head in the place of a woman's buttocks), has confused many in terms of its possible meanings, particularly the juxtaposition of Saturn's rings and a woman's buttocks. What we do know is that the ominous instrument being held is taken from a nineteenth-century illustration of a scientific toy, essentially a pop gun. There is also a short text that accompanies *My Little Mont Blanc* but it does little to illuminate the meaning of the image:

The little black person is cold. Three lights barely move again, barely if the planets, despite their full sails, float forward: since three o'clock there's been no wind, since three o'clock gravity has ceased to exist. In the peat bogs, the black grass is menaced by the prestidigitator and remains on the ground with the bald ones and the softness of their skin that the day begins to embroider with bitter clouds.<sup>9</sup>

However, a possible reading of the print emerges with the knowledge that the last day of the alchemical process is Saturday and that Ernst links that day to the theme of lust in *Une Semaine de bonté*, underscoring once again the fact that the completion of the alchemical process is often symbolically represented by the union of the sexes. Saturday is named after the planet Saturn and lust is its theme, so *My Little Mont Blanc* may be a humorous

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<sup>8</sup> My analysis of this plate draws largely from M.E. Warlick's seminal work on alchemy and its use in Ernst's art. See M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), pp. 113–115.

<sup>9</sup> My translation from the original French found in Max Ernst, *Écritures* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1970), p. 130.

acting out of the culmination of the alchemical process, but one that appears to have failed since the projectile of the pop gun has missed its mark.<sup>10</sup>

Saturn re-emerges in a number of other works, examples being found in the series of 1931 prints *Inside Sight*, where we have an imaginative filling in of the relative sizes of the sun seen from various planets and satellites, as well as an image of the relative size of five planets to that of the sun. In the latter we find, once again, references to alchemical imagery, with the two figures in the middle of the sun representing the alchemical king and queen, who are a more traditional symbol of the union of the sexes in alchemy, and a rather interesting cryptic reference to the sun as generator of solar energy in its alchemical formulation of a fertilizing energy, the solar semen or solar wind. The trumpet is symbolic of this solar wind, which is linked ultimately to the divine breath, while it is also cryptically represented by the interior form of the sun, which Ernst took from a nineteenth-century illustration of the action of an air current on a melted alloy.<sup>11</sup>

The solar wind in alchemy is what pushes the planets through their orbits and is sometimes represented by angels, as found in Ernst's *Flamingos* (Private Collection, Paris) and *Cormorants* (Fig. 4), both from 1920. In these two works we have an unusual image made up of a photograph of flamingos, to which is added an aerial photograph of a harbour, a gothic rose window, a diagram of the human brain, and, at the top, Saturn with an angel behind it. Images of the interior of our bodies are used frequently by Ernst and their use is most likely indebted to Leonardo da Vinci's belief that the human body is a microcosmic analogue of the universe. The specific use of the image of a brain may be referencing either the creative mind of God, the artist's, the viewer's, or the dreaming mind. The harbour refers obviously to travel, either arrival or departure, a common symbol in landscape paintings of the seventeenth century, and the flamingos are a symbol of spiritual flight (as well as spiritual birth, given that they are water fowl). Obviously part of the theme of the *Flamingos* and *Cormorants* is one of movement upward, a type of Neo-Platonic movement of the soul, a theme echoed in alchemy as well. The objective seems to be related to Saturn, which is directly linked to the rose window,

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<sup>10</sup> My discussion of *Une Semaine de bonté* is drawn again from Warlick, however, its use to elucidate the meaning of *My Little Mont Blanc* is my own. See M.E. Warlick, 'Max Ernst's Alchemical Novel: *Une Semaine de bonté*', *Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1987): pp. 61–73.

<sup>11</sup> Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, pp. 117–120.

a symbol of the perfection of the created world, with God at its centre and all of the created world emanating from him/her and returning to him/her. The angel may be one of the seven archangels, Cassiel, who is the ruler and mover of the planet Saturn and who reveals the unity of the eternal kingdom, a theme that fits well with the inclusion of the rose window.<sup>12</sup>

There is the mention of an angel in another Ernst collage of 1920 that is part of a series of works produced between 1919 and 1922, many including what appear to be representations of constellations. At the bottom of *Katharina Ondulata* (Fig. 5) is the following inscription: 'Undulating Katharina, i.e., mistress of the inn on the Lahn appears as guardian angel and mother-of-pearl of the Germans on cork soles in the zodiac sign of cancer'.<sup>13</sup> Like *Approaching Puberty...*, which belongs arguably to the same series, 'Katharina' makes reference to waves and hence suggests that she has reached a period of fertility.<sup>14</sup> There is a connection to a specific constellation in the inscription, but there doesn't appear to be any clear notation in the image that suggests Cancer. It is possible that the oval form resembling a woman's private parts is a cryptic allusion to the swarm of stars named Praesepe, also known as the beehive, a distinguishing feature of Cancer. Why Cancer, though, may be explained by its connection to waves and the moon, since the crab, who lives on the shore of the ocean, is affected by the waxing and waning of the moon.<sup>15</sup> The reference to the inn may also have something to do with Cancer since the Greek term 'Praesepe' means 'manger', and hence we have a link to the birth of Christ, and references to Christ have quite a particular and personal significance for Ernst, which I will touch on shortly.

I can speculate as to what constellations are shown on the left side of *Katharina Ondulata*, and this is a game I am certain Ernst wanted us to play. There are a number of possibilities if we accept that some of these

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<sup>12</sup> For an understanding of the meaning of the Gothic rose window, in terms of its geometry and light symbolism, see Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1986), chaps II–IV; and Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), chap. 2.

<sup>13</sup> William Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism*, exh. cat. (Houston & Munich: The Menil Collection & Prestel-Verlage, 1993), pp. 82–83.

<sup>14</sup> The expression 'mistress of the inn on the Lahn' is the first line of a popular schoolboy song, which is of a type that can be extended indefinitely with the addition of new verses; this may be a reference to the openness of interpretation of this image.

<sup>15</sup> The moon is said to have been in Cancer at the time of creation.



may be fragments of constellations or ambiguous generic notations, pseudo-constellations, that are meant to suggest more than one constellation. With the mention of the crab, my guess is that the middle left image represents a portion of Hercules, whose toe was pinched by the crab sent by Hera, and the upper left is Cygnus.<sup>16</sup> Ernst's interest in Hercules may be related to the solar symbolism associated with the mythological hero. With the defeat of the Nemean lion during his first labour, and whose skin he wore for the rest of his labours, Hercules came to be associated with the sun. In addition, his labours came to symbolize the sun's yearly passage through the zodiac. Lastly, Hercules' labours were seen as an allegory of the journey of the human soul toward spiritual purification.<sup>17</sup> As for my reasons for identifying Cygnus, this constellation would have interested Ernst because the swan is the guise Zeus took to seduce Leda. Ernst even produced a print that more directly alludes to this myth, and his interest in the theme was partially sparked by Leonardo da Vinci's lost work, *Leda and the Swan*.<sup>18</sup> It should also be noted that Ernst himself, in 1929, would introduce us to his alter ego, the superior bird LopLop.

Zeus' seduction of Leda resulted in the birth of the twins, Castor and Pollux, Gemini, who appear in Ernst's *Castor and Pollution* of 1923 (Private Collection).<sup>19</sup> Here, the artist addresses, according to Elizabeth Legge, the theme of masturbation and ejaculation with a playful reminder of the idea of wind or breath as a divine fertilizing principle, namely by way of the wind apparatus that is in fact a nineteenth-century device for ventilating mineshafts.<sup>20</sup> In 1914, the British psychoanalyst Ernest Jones interpreted whistling as a symbol of ejaculation and sucking as masturbation and, in case there was any doubt, Pollux's name is literally corrupted by Ernst into 'pollution', the dangers of which the artist published

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<sup>16</sup> Allen, p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> Ernst's interest in the figure of Hercules is expressed explicitly and humorously in his 1949 *Paramyths*. Charlotte Stokes connects the inscription of the *Hercules* collage to Freud's theories on jokes and specifically wordplay; see Charlotte Stokes, 'Collage as Jokework: Freud's Theories of Wit as the Foundation for the Collages of Max Ernst,' *Leonardo* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1982): p. 202.

<sup>18</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist Painting, 1929-1939* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1979), pp. 92–6.

<sup>19</sup> Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources* (Ann Arbor, MI, and London: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp. 125–31.

on in 1931 in rebellion to his own Catholic upbringing.<sup>21</sup> The heavenly twins are more specifically connected to Ernst in that they were favourites among mariners, and in the biography of Ernst I cited at the beginning he is mentioned as useful for information about coastal waters. The twins may also represent Ernst and Paul Eluard, the French writer who was Ernst's closest friend during the 1920s, and whose wife, Gala Eluard, Ernst was having an affair with. Significantly, Gala's real name was Helen; in the mythological accounts of the twins, Helen is Pollux's sister, born from the same egg laid by Leda.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, I suspect that Ernst took on the guise of Castor specifically since Castor was noted as being an excellent horseman, a theme which reminds us of Ernst's love of the star Alcor.

Castor and Pollux are situated on the zodiac band between Cancer and Taurus, which may explain the convolution of constellations that suggest either Cancer, Taurus, Gemini, and possibly also Hercules in *Untitled* (Fig. 6). Taurus emerges in this mix as it contains the Pleiades. Their connection to Castor and Pollux may simply be to reinforce the twins' reputation as abductors of young maidens. The presence of Hercules in the list of constellation suspects for *Untitled* is probably explained by the fact that, according to some accounts, Castor taught Hercules how to fight; and specifically in using the sword that was given to Hercules by Hermes.

Hermes brings us back to the Pleiades yet again since he was the son of Maia, the eldest and most beautiful of the seven sisters, and the product of another of Zeus' indiscretions.<sup>23</sup> Ernst often associated himself with Hermes; as M.E. Warlick has so convincingly shown, Ernst based his famous 1922 group portrait *At the Rendez-vous of Friends* (Museum Ludwig, Cologne) on 'Children of Mercury' prints from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. He has Raphael and Dostoevsky acting as representatives of painting and literature, two of the arts influenced by the planet Mercury, while its influence on architects is indicated by the presence of the open structure on the left.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, as well, Mercury or Hermes was believed to rule astronomers, a role Ernst fancied himself in and toyed with again when he planned to use a symbolic representation of Stolas, a demon listed in the Goetia who is a teacher of astronomy, herbology, and virtues of precious stones, for his biographical notes published in 1942. Subtly, as well, Ernst provides himself with wings

<sup>21</sup> Max Ernst, 'Danger de Pollution', *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* 3 (1931).

<sup>22</sup> Hamilton, p. 46.

<sup>23</sup> Allen, p. 405.

<sup>24</sup> Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, pp. 66–72.

through the placement of the hand of the figure behind him, Hans Arp, and placed an apple, another of the symbols of Mercury, to his right.

One of the appeals of Hermes/Mercury for Ernst was the mythological figure's talents for mischief and invention, two qualities Ernst possessed in abundance.<sup>25</sup> I suspect, though, that Hermes was also important in terms of his association to the sun, a quality that attracted Ernst to Hercules as well. Hermes is related to Apollo, the Greek sun god, by way of his theft of some of Apollo's cattle, for which he would later make amends.<sup>26</sup> But Hermes and Apollo are also related in astronomical terms, since the morning star that ancient astronomers identified as Mercury was not thought to be the same as the evening one, which it was, and that they called Apollo. Apollo himself has a significant Christian connection, and Christian symbolism, as already hinted at throughout this talk, plays a critical role in Ernst's tapestry of myth.

A great deal of Ernst's imagery centres around relations between father and son. As Ernst has documented in his autobiographical notes, his relations with his father were problematic and marked a number of significant childhood events for Ernst.<sup>27</sup> One of the most important of these was when Ernst wandered off at the age of five wearing nothing but a red nightgown and joined a group of Kevelaer pilgrims who whispered, 'It's the Christ Child'. The infant believed the pilgrims, and walked with them for a short time; but Ernst was eventually found and taken home, and his father blew his top when the boy told him he was the Christ child. Oddly enough, Ernst's father was a painter, and he portrayed his son as the infant Jesus in an 1896 work that survives to this day in a private collection.<sup>28</sup> Max Ernst often mused that if he was the Christ child then that made his father God, which is how Ernst's father is portrayed in *Pieta, Revolution by Night* (1923, The Tate Gallery, London), holding Ernst as the dead Christ in a pose that reminds one of Ernst's sitting on the lap of Dostoevsky in *At Rendez-vous of Friends*. One has to keep this Christian theme constantly in mind when looking at the various myths Ernst used throughout his work. Apollo, Hermes, Hercules, the manger in Cancer, etc., all are related in some form or fashion to Christian imagery and partly

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<sup>25</sup> Hamilton, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Hamilton, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Ernst's interest in Saturn may be related to its mythological theme of rebellion against the father.

<sup>28</sup> Max Ernst, 'Biographical Notes: Tissue of Truth, Tissue of Lies,' in Spies, *Max Ernst: A Retrospective*, pp. 281–281.

explain the attraction to many of the myths associated with the celestial phenomena found or obliquely referred to in Ernst's work.

The sun though has another important role for Ernst to play and this last one returns us to the subject of the artist's interest in alchemy. In the background of *At the Rendez-vous of Friends*, one finds a solar eclipse that results in the production of a solar halo. This plays a crucial role in alchemy since solar eclipses are yet another symbol of the union of opposites in the alchemical process, a union described by one of the more famous alchemists, Hermes Trismegistus – yet another reason for Ernst's desire to be identified as Hermes.<sup>29</sup> The most complex of the works of Ernst that involves solar and lunar imagery is his famous *Of This Men Shall Know Nothing* (Fig. 7), a work that teases us in terms of its meaning and one that has obviously brought forth a wave of speculation.<sup>30</sup> To put it simply, we are looking at the union of sun and moon, a symbolic representation of alchemical perfection, that is further demonstrated by the copulating

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<sup>29</sup> Legge, pp. 88-91.

<sup>30</sup> The work was given to André Breton, the author of the 1924 *Surrealist Manifesto* that officially launched the movement, and bears the following inscription on the back, written by Ernst:

The crescent moon (yellow and parachute-like)  
prevents the little whistle from falling to  
the ground.  
Because someone is paying attention to it, the  
whistle thinks that it is rising to the sun.  
The sun is divided in two, the better to  
revolve.  
The model is stretched out in a dream-like pose.  
The right leg is bent back (a pleasing and  
precise movement).  
The hand shields the Earth. By this motion,  
the Earth takes on the importance of a sexual  
organ.  
The moon goes very quickly through its  
phases and eclipses.  
The picture is odd in its symmetry. The  
two sexes balance each other there.

William Camfield supplies an excellent account of the various interpretations put forth in unravelling the meaning 'Of This Men Shall Know Nothing'; see Camfield, *Max Ernst* pp. 134–136.

figures, and underscored by the whistle that relates to the divine breath or fertilizing breath, and the bow and hand with the archer's glove that has yet another mythological connection, namely Artemis or her Roman counterpart, Diana. However, one is not too certain as to how successful of a union we might be witnessing since the land below is somewhat barren and the eclipse could be a lunar one, whose meaning is the opposite of the solar eclipse. But as the title states, we may never know what is going on in this painting, as is the case with much of Max Ernst's work.

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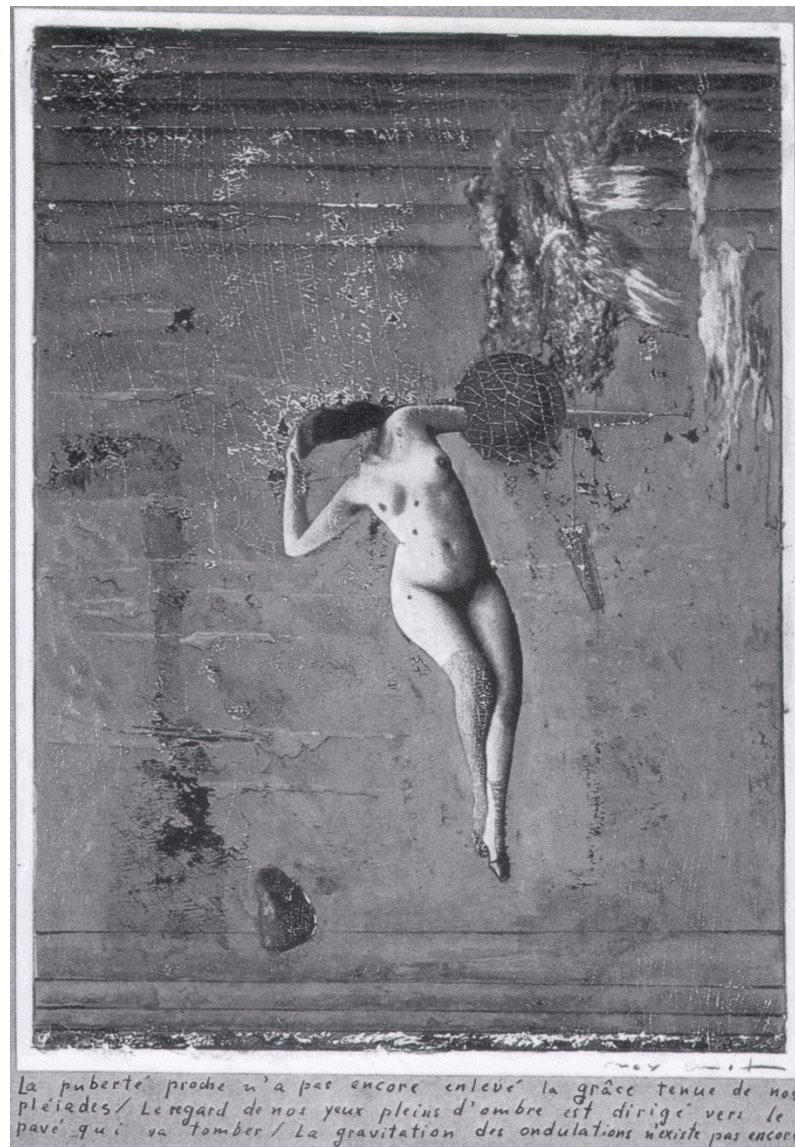


Figure 1. Max Ernst, *Approaching Puberty...*, 1921, collage with fragments of photographs, overpainted with gouache and oil on paper laid on card. 14.5 cm x 16.5 cm, Private Collection. © Estate of Max Ernst/ADAGP (Paris)/SODRAC (Montréal) 2003.



Figure 2. Max Ernst, *Here All Together Are My Seven Sisters, Often Living on Liquid Dreams and Perfectly Resembling Sleeping Leaves*, plate 56, *Femme 100 tête*, 1929. © Estate of Max Ernst/ADAGP (Paris)/SODRAC (Montréal) 2003.



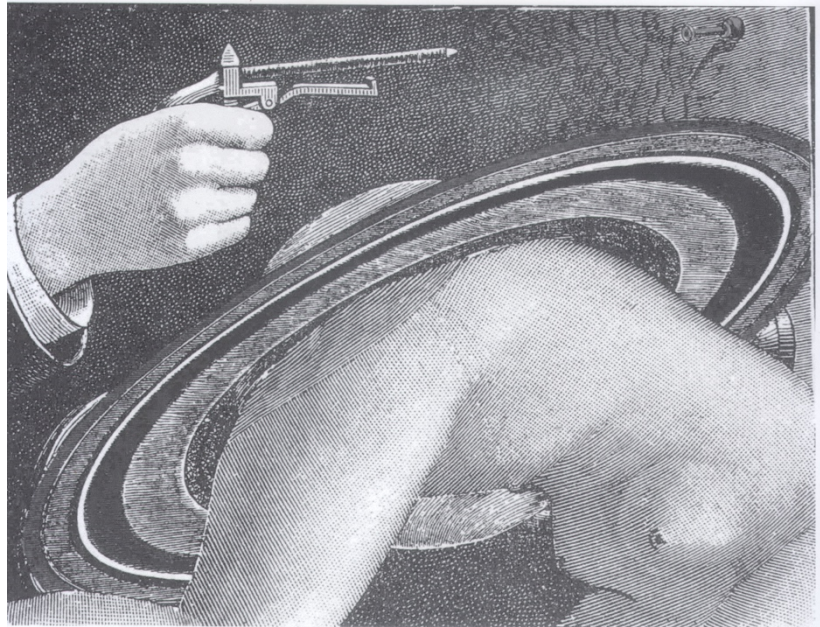


Figure 3. Max Ernst, *Mon Petit Mont Blanc*, from *Les Malheurs des Immortels* [*The Misfortunes of the Immortals*], 1922. © Estate of Max Ernst/ADAGP (Paris)/SODRAC (Montréal) 2003.



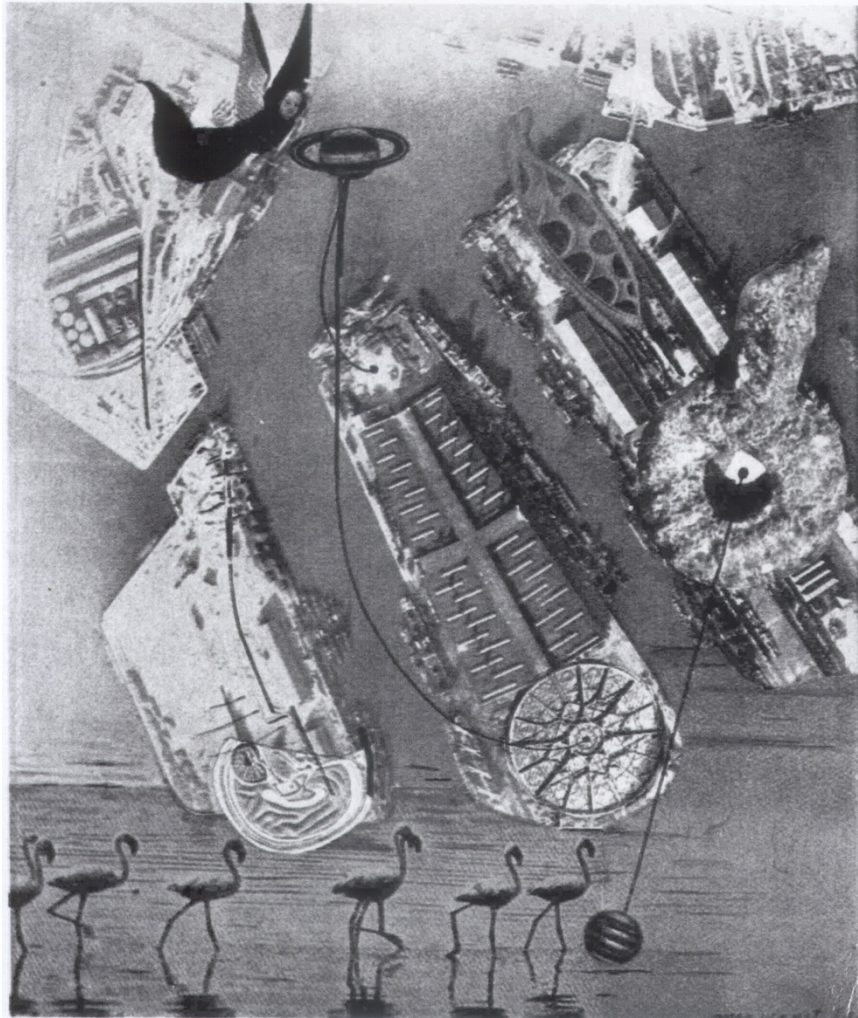


Figure 4. Max Ernst, *Cormorants*, 1920, cut printed reproductions, gouache, ink, and pencil on photographic reproduction, 15.6 cm x 13 cm, Private Collection, Paris. © Estate of Max Ernst/ADAGP (Paris)/SODRAC (Montréal) 2003.

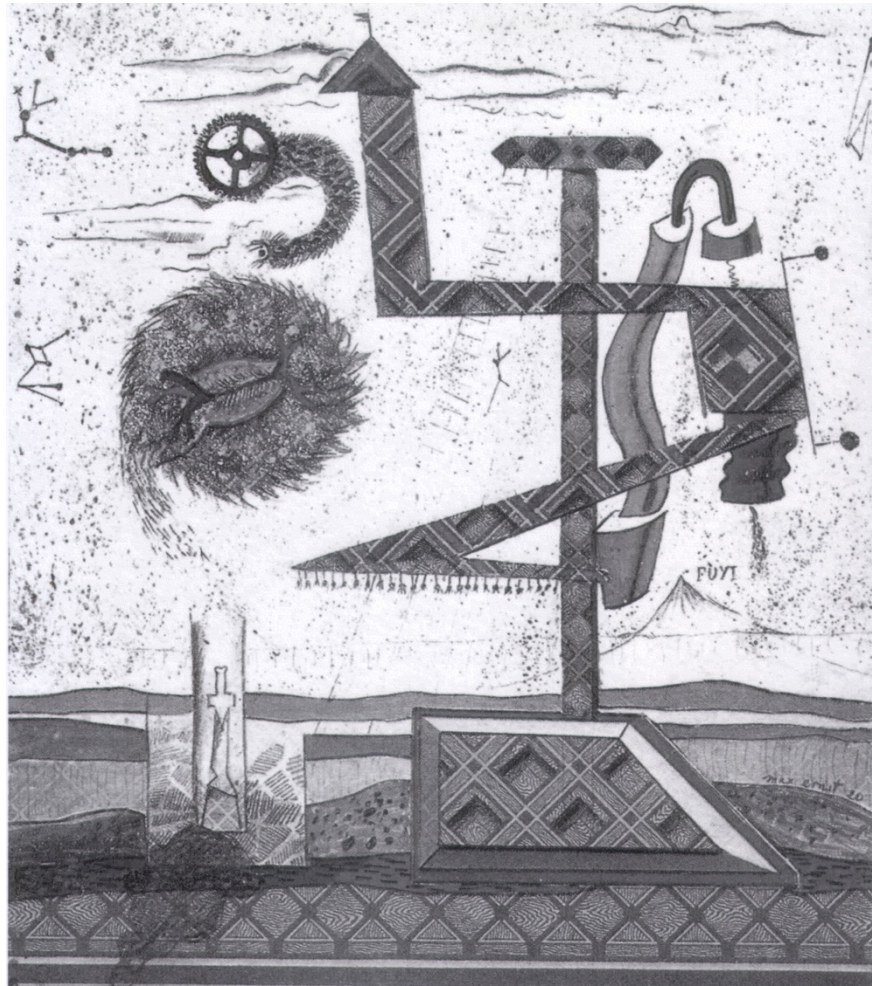


Figure 5. *Katharina Ondulata*, 1920, gouache and pencil on wallpaper mounted on paperboard, 31.1 cm x 27 cm, private Collection, England. © Estate of Max Ernst/ADAGP (Paris)/SODRAC (Montréal) 2003.



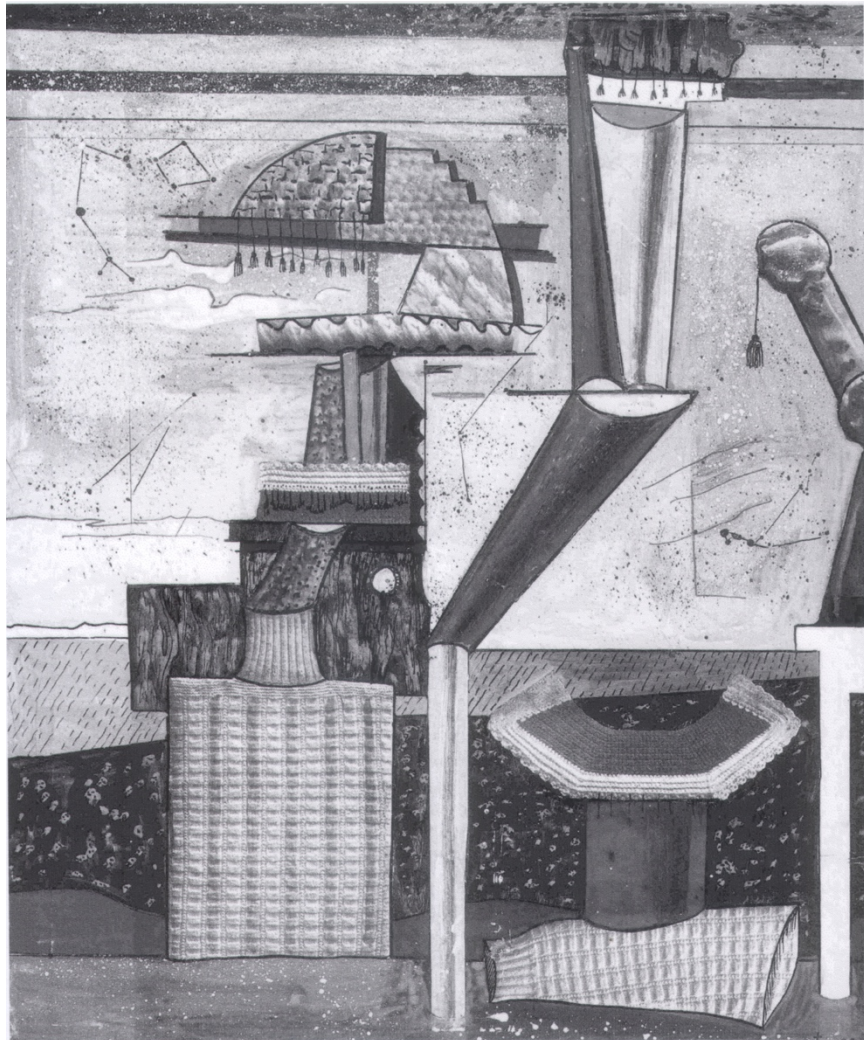


Figure 6. *Untitled*, 1920, gouache, ink and pencil on printed reproduction mounted on paperboard, 30 cm x 25.1 cm, Private Collection, Paris. © Estate of Max Ernst/ADAGP (Paris)/SODRAC (Montréal) 2003.

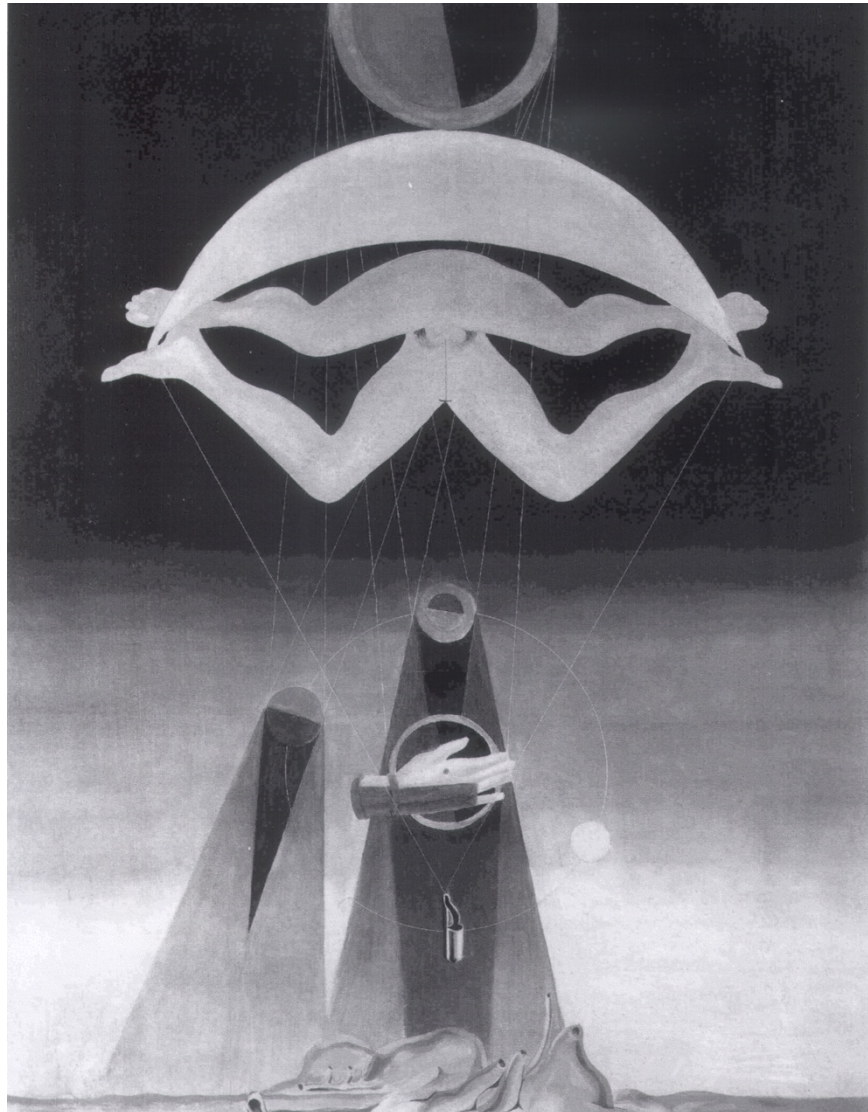


Figure 7. Max Ernst, *Les Hommes n'en sauront rien* (*Men Shall Know Nothing of This*), 1923, oil on canvas, 80.5 cm x 64 cm, The Tate Gallery, London. © Estate of Max Ernst/ADAGP (Paris)/SODRAC (Montréal) 2003.

